

Let us pray for God's help:

Lord, please let this be primarily about your glory, your extraordinary love for sinners, and rivers of unending joy in Jesus that must be told to peoples everywhere of every ability. Help us to honor and send this family who we love in ways that celebrate you as the supreme and glorious treasure you are. Please, Lord, more of you. In Jesus name, Amen.

About seven or eight years ago a fellow by the name of Justin Reimer called me at my office. We knew someone in common who thought we should be introduced. Justin seemed to know leaders in every Christian ministry we talked about, which was impressive. But God had done three things for me in making this connection:

1. We were blood-bought brothers in Jesus Christ
2. Fathers of boys with disabilities
3. Justin had fully embraced God's sovereignty over all things, including Eli's extra copy of chromosome 21 in every cell of his body

That last one, embracing God's sovereignty over disability, was unusual, even in Christian circles, because it is so hard and countercultural. Yet it is in hard things that friendships frequently emerge, isn't it? We have done some interesting things together and encouraged each other and I count the Reimer family as kin. I know you do as well.

So, after Justin asked me to do this portion of their commissioning and having a sense of his heart and having prayed for God's help, I want to take a look at just two things that have brought all of us here to help launch the Reimer family into full-time ministry in the Ukraine.

- 1) The motivation of missions
- 2) Who is called into missions

John Piper is my former pastor and current colleague at Desiring God and he wrote a book on missions titled *Let the Nations Be Glad*. It begins with this very strong statement:

Missions exists because worship doesn't. Missions is our way of saying: the joy of knowing Christ is not a private or tribal or national or ethnic privilege. It is for

all. And that's why we go. Because we have tasted the joy of worshipping Jesus, and we want all the families of the earth included.

All the families! All people - of every nation and tribe and tongue, of every physical, cognitive and sensory ability - need to know Jesus so they can experience joy in worshipping him; the same joy that we have experienced. Hence, somebody has to go, and preferably that somebody understands that all means all.

Yet, it is also reasonable to ask the question about why this family and this place. The Ukraine is a culturally and spiritually dark place - alcoholism, drug abuse and abortion exist at alarming rates. Services for families experiencing disability pale in comparison to the United States - it is internationally known as 'disability unfriendly.' And on their eastern border sits a super power fueling violence, political instability and with a history of murderous cruelty.

And those may not even be the greatest dangers facing this family. Hearts can be motivated by a sense of adventure, heroism, romance or sentiment that has little or nothing to do with God. "I will go" can appear to be a selfless, Godly commitment when the heart is craving and feeding off the approval of people. Or it can be motivated by a stoic sense of obedience to prove one's faith. In many senses, self-reliance and self-promotion are more dangerous than any geopolitical or cultural circumstance.

So what is a proper motivation?

If you have a Bible on your phone (and you should), please go to Hebrews 12:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
(Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV)

You have been well taught here so you know that whenever you see the word 'therefore' you should pause and find out what it's there for.

Hebrews 11 is known as the 'heroes of the faith' chapter that begins a descriptor for each person with 'by faith.' For example, by faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain; by faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death.

We read about Moses' faith in Hebrews 11:26: He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (Hebrews 11:26 ESV)

It includes incredible examples of God's rescue and power:

- By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land
- By faith the walls of Jericho fell down
- A list of faithful like Gideon, David and Samuel who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection.

And chapter 11 ends on both a hard and glorious note:

They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. **And all these, though commended through their faith**, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:39-40 ESV)

These are the witnesses we look to for examples of faith. Glorious victories and extraordinary difficulties. Safety was not a motivator. Nor was desire for reputation or praise from other people. And all were commended for their faith.

Let us re-read Hebrews 12:1-2:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV)

And here we see what motivated Jesus - joy! Jesus was motivated by the joy set before him. We have tasted joy in Jesus and we want everyone, everywhere to experience it! But it is not a joy meant only to be remembered - back then, I prayed a prayer of faith, experienced freedom from my sin for the first time and that filled my heart with joy - and that memory sustains me and my faith. No!

You already know it doesn't work like that - our life of faith has ebbs and flows; it must be active and intentional and fed - most importantly, connected to someone greater than ourselves. The race analogy in Hebrews 12:1 is helpful here - we run setting aside sin and anything else that would encumber us so that we can endure in this race to the very end. Setting aside sin makes sense because sin leads to death and eternal separation from God - the opposite of faith and being commended by God. But it also includes setting aside even good things so that we can run this race. It changes the question from 'is this effort or behavior or purchase or investment of time good or bad' to 'does it help me run the race God has called me to run'?

We can all agree that The Elisha Foundation as conceived of, created by and delivered through Justin and Tamara is a very good thing. God-honoring, Bible-saturated, community-building, faith-sustaining - these descriptors are earned and deserved because God created a very good thing through Justin and Tamara and they worked hard to make it into something that has blessed many, many people. Yet, this call to full-time ministry in the Ukraine meant that they could no longer fulfill all the obligations to the work here. The Lord has kindly supplied that need through Brad and Sara Franklin, but let us not minimize that this step required setting aside something precious to them so that in faith they could pursue something very different. We don't do this easily or naturally - something more valuable and more precious has to be motivating this change.

Let us return to Hebrews 12. The writer of Hebrews takes us even deeper - we are looking to the one who is the founder of our faith and the current, active perfecter of our faith. It was Jesus' work that started this faith and it is Jesus who continues to deepen our delight in him and our dependency on him.

Consider this: the most painful, most demeaning, most isolating act in all of history could not deter Jesus from the joy set before him. Thus, Reimer family, you can endure not because of inner wells of strength or courage or intestinal fortitude, but because you cling in faith to the one who understands pain and suffering; he is the one who endured for the joy set before him and was raised from the dead and rescues you from your sin. And he is the one who is right now active in your lives - look to him!

Thus, if missions is designed to increase worship, and we experience joy in knowing and worshipping Christ who rescued us, then the answer of who is involved in missions is obvious for all who cling to Jesus in faith: everyone is involved in missions!

Twenty years ago at my church, my pastor for preaching and my then-pastor for missions wrote a document that included this paragraph about the role of church members:

To send in a manner worthy of God is to so recognize the supreme importance of proclaiming the name of God in word and deed among the nations that we will do whatever we can to support those who go out for the sake of the name — spiritually, practically, emotionally, financially.

I know there are several churches represented here, but I want to speak directly to Grace Bible Church of Bend, OR for a moment. As a young church sending out your first missionaries, you are declaring to each other and to the world that you want to be part of the great commission given by God himself. Clearly you recognize the needs in your own community for evangelism and discipleship while at the same time having a heart for people far away who do not yet know Jesus. And you recognize that it is costly - a part of your very body is leaving you, a piece of your heart and contributors to the health of this community is leaving you for the sake of people you do not know - yet, because of Jesus, and not just out of obedience as important as that is, you know it is absolutely worth it. So, we are rightly both happy and sad, excited and concerned. Motivated, ultimately, by joy that God's glory will be declared and Jesus as greatest treasure proclaimed and lived.

And you know it is not a one-time act! When Justin asked me to join you today, he referenced a great missionary analogy from William Carey who was going to India in 1792 and saw his mission as a miner entering into a deep mine, which had never been explored, with no one to guide. He said to Andrew Fuller and John Ryland and his other pastor friends: "I will go down, if you will hold the rope." And John Ryland reports: "He took an oath from each of us, at the mouth of the pit, to this effect—that 'while we lived, we should never let go of the rope.'"

Church, this is your commitment to this dear family - to never let go of the rope. To send from your body means that you continue to care deeply and regularly for those you have sent for the sake of the name.

I am an outsider here and do not know what things you have in place, so let me either encourage you to continue or encourage you to start by having a group of you commit to a monthly gathering with the single purpose to pray for this family. Do not do so just for their sake but for your own benefit. For the past 12 years my wife and I have gathered with three other couples monthly for the sole purpose of praying for a missionary couple who are in Thailand translating the Bible for several small people groups spread across Southeast Asia. I think we had the normal thoughts of praying for fruitfulness and effectiveness in their work, that the Lord would provide their financial needs, for safety in body and protection of their marriage and the like. What I did not fully appreciate then was how much the normal challenges of parenting and marriage and simply working with other people would intensify when pursuing the one thing they longed to do in translating the Bible. Nor did I fully appreciate that they have a real enemy in Satan who hates their work and wants to ruin their faith and their family. Nor did I appreciate how important it was for them to know they had not been forgotten; that they are known, that their children are known, as years go by at their sending church.

The benefit for us was maturing in our faith, praying regularly for impossible things to happen but for God's help and watching how God continued to sustain the work through many dangers, toils and snares. Their monthly report on the most intimate things in their lives and work has changed me to better understand how big God truly is and how dependent I am as I see how dependent they are - no romantic notions, no sweet sentimentality - much hard, frequently disappointing work motivated by joy in Jesus. And the stories of God's successes land on us with unusual delight and power! It is a great privilege. And it is not for everyone. This is not a nice thing to do - it is spiritual warfare. And it requires discernment and discretion - like most of us we have friends who know more than others about our lives and circumstances because of their maturity or age or wisdom or Godly example or simply their ability to refrain from gossip. Some of you need to be that kind of rope holder.

For the rest of you ropeholders, also make the commitment to pray. Every missionary should be prayed for regularly.

Please also support them financially, as churches and individually. Finances are measurable, unlike much of what they will be doing. So lift their burden and increase your own joy in participating in their work by being part of how God supplies for their financial needs - through you!

And then increase their joy even more by sending more people into missions from all the churches represented here. There are more than 1 billion people living with

disabilities in the world. Some of the least evangelized within people groups are those with disabilities. Let your churches be scandalously known for embracing all that God has called you to do, including sending more. Elders, prepare and know your people such that you can be encouraging some to consider the great call to go and serve, and not just your teens and 20 somethings. Then hold the ropes for them knowing that God will help you do it.

We all have responsibilities toward missions. But you, Reimer family, have discerned and accepted a very specific call into a specific area of the world. And so I want to speak directly to you.

Elisha, we know God made you just as he intended. Ephesians 2:10 couldn't be more clear:

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10 ESV)

You are his workmanship, Eli. Created for good works.

And just to be crystal clear to everyone that it includes Down syndrome, God gave us this: Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11 ESV) God is delighted in how he made you for his glory and for your good. Don't ever forget that - his glory, your good.

Naomi, Evangeline, Abram and Noelle, I am the father of four children, the oldest being a son with disabilities. And I have seen my children at times struggle within the fishbowl of being 'that family' and 'those children' who are known primarily not for who you are or what you have done but by a physical characteristic their brother has. I have also seen them enjoy their brother a great deal and embrace all that he is with affection. There is certainly joy - and times of confusion and sadness and even embarrassment.

Your father's heart and your mother's heart is to know your heart as you experience all the changes that are coming from moving to an entirely different place and in all the transitions that come from growing up. You honor them and you help yourself by letting your joys and your sorrows be known, and, with your parent's knowledge and blessing, being connected to other adults who care about you both here and there.

Let me be clear. You are not going to the Ukraine, ultimately, because of your brother's Down syndrome or because of your parents' decision. You are there because God put you in a family, this family, intentionally, for his glory and for your good. If you doubt that goodness, never doubt that your parents and these people who care about you will embrace you fully and love you completely in both the joy and sadness you experience.

Tamara and Justin, this is not your first transition and I wonder if this is harder or easier than some of your other transitions. Or maybe both at the same time. I recall that before your oldest son was born you were preparing to be missionaries to Russia. Yet the Lord had already been making ready your hearts to treasure Jesus more than the call you were preparing for. So you embraced a new calling. Beautiful example. And when The Elisha Foundation needed your full attention, the aviation company you had founded needed to be stewarded by others. Very good things needed to be let go so that the race in front of you could be fully embraced. So encouraging, and so hard.

And I do not know all that God was doing in your hearts to send you to the Ukraine, but it makes sense to this outsider looking in. There have been Reimers in the Ukraine for hundreds of years. I don't know if you're related to any of them, but I found that interesting. You've done short-term missions work there and know something of the situation. It is not an easy situation.

Jake Knotts, pastor in Chernigov, described that situation this way:

The thing is that in our context (Ukraine), being mentally or physically disabled means you are rejected in society, pretty much locked up in your apartment, and you and everyone else thinks this is a sign of God's disfavor and a curse. Many of these kids are in wheelchairs and live in apartment buildings without elevators and make it outside rarely. These families are in many ways broken in spirit.

There is also no sense of community amongst the families themselves.

And that begins to make it more clear to me as you look to Jesus in going to the Ukraine. This is simply not acceptable to Justin and Tamara, that any person of any ability would be seen as a curse. That any family would not be part of a community. And most importantly, that people in the Ukraine wouldn't know about Jesus and all his intentionality in creating them, making them alive in him when they were dead in their sins, and then enjoying him as the blazing center of all things.

I had the privilege earlier this year to be in Poland where I met Kseniia Bondarenko who does orphan and disability care in the Ukraine and she confirmed what Pastor Knotts described - families abandoned, living under shame and guilt. In the worst cases facing unbearable pain some of these families abandoned their children with disabilities to institutions. Yet, this woman also spoke of the joy of her very hard work, not from a breezy sentimentality but on the foundation that Christ is for her in all her own brokenness and weakness and gives her the opportunity to express the joy she has in Jesus through this work on behalf of families living with disability. There is such deep need there, and the Spirit is already blowing in the Ukraine.

And then I met Dr. Nathan Grills over the summer, a medical missionary to India who has observed two things - first, that his profoundly disabled daughter has made him a better missionary as he understands more of the pain and hardship and suffering of the people God has sent him to serve; and second, that his daughter is an effective missionary herself as her very presence demonstrates the power of God in how he makes and sustains all those he has made in his image. Dr. Grills poses this question back to the church - rather than discouraging families with disabled children from missions, we should be sending out more families experiencing disability because they are so unusually effective!

But we do not let our experiences define what is Godly or ultimately effective. The Bible has the authority to define our experience so let us see if this is actually true:

God's making people with disabilities is clear - we've talked about that already.

But what about the calling? From 1 Corinthians 1:

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:26-31 ESV)

Three times God chooses people we would not naturally choose - and because of God's choices you are in Christ Jesus. But Paul didn't stop there. Later in Corinthians he says this:

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, (1 Corinthians 12:22 ESV)

Amazing! God says the weaker member is indispensable! I love how Paul frames that statement - seems to be weaker! We see with natural eyes but God sees the heart and what he has put in place and in play for his glory and for the good of his church.

So it makes sense - God is lifting this family who we all love dearly and taking them to a place that is experiencing deep economic and political chaos, into a culture that denigrates and shames families experiencing disability. God has uniquely qualified them to help people there see what they cannot now see - that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him regardless of our circumstances. People there and here cannot deny that they have left the relative comfort and ease of Bend, Oregon to bring them something more valuable than ease and comfort. Further, they are a family of seven going to a place where abortion is rampant and families are so small they are declining in population. And one of this family's members lives with an obvious disability - and he is embraced as a full member and fully human - both sinner and saint in this present age, gifted by God himself to work for God's glory. This family has been designed by God to cut through spiritual and cultural fog in ways that other families cannot - and God is glorified.

God did that. God is doing that. And God can sustain it.

In Hebrews 11 we saw that Moses was looking to his reward. Paul also taught us there is reward, from 2 Corinthians 4:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 ESV)

Eternal, ever increasing weight of glory beyond compare. The Bible is clear about suffering being our common experience, but that suffering simply does not compare to the weight of glory that awaits. Who suffered more than any person ever has or ever

will? Jesus did. How do we endure through suffering of every kind? Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

In a minute we're going to sing a beautiful song that includes this anthem: We go to all the world with kingdom hope unfurled. No other name has power to save but Jesus Christ the Lord.

No other name but Jesus Christ the Lord! Our savior, for the joy set before him endured the cross!

So, Reimer family, let your joy in Jesus overflow to people experiencing disability in the Ukraine and to everyone else. May your joy increase as you look to Jesus in all circumstances. And may you take this blessing from Romans 15:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Amen